

# The Midland

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## In Limine

By MAHLON LEONARD FISHER

I fear the chance of Immortality:  
For me, I would be dreamless: I would end  
As utterly as atoms when they blend  
With sunlight and are swept into the sea,  
Becoming part of its immensity,  
But serving no set purpose, save to poise  
Midway between the stillness and the noise  
Of upper ocean; and unnumbered be.  
For I have counted on oblivion,  
And on inertness, who have guessed one may  
Remember back to sadness in a Day  
Of much remembering! So would I shun  
The Utmost Overthrow, if, by a breath,  
However fleeting, it be less than *Death!*

## "Forenoon, and Afternoon, and—Night"

By FLORENCE LIVINGSTON JOY

A new biography is on the market. The writer, William Belmont Parker; the book, *Edward Rowland Sill, His Life and Work*. Merely to get up a biography, even though it be the first complete story of the shy American poet who was "contented to die unknown," wins for an author no especial distinction. But to unclasp for the people, as Mr. Parker does, a book of life that offers refreshing and cheering and inspiring disclosure of a brave and fine and gentle man—a man who loved truth, in the audience chamber of whose quiet heart the still small voice spoke clearly—to do all this without violating the sanctity of that reticent nature, is accomplishment distinctive.

"To keep a thought seven years"—the haunting phrase from Sill's *Field Notes* repeats and repeats itself as the reader feels the growing effects of Mr. Parker's manner of developing this "life:"

"To keep a thought seven years, and then  
Welcome it coming to you  
On the way from another's brain and pen—"

for Parker tells in his preface that his book was ten years in the making. The volume follows a deviation from his original scheme of essay and criticism. Doubtless the criticism would have gone well enough, but very sure is one that the finally adopted plan of

having the poet live again through his private letters, eventuates, through Mr. Parker's happy choice and arrangement of material, in a book of enlivening and reverential interest. Parker acknowledges that his "sailing orders" came from Sir Leslie Stephen and from Edward Rowland Sill himself: from Sir Leslie's opinion—"Nobody ever wrote a dull autobiography. . . . The biographer never can equal the autobiographer, but with a sufficient supply of letters, he may approach very closely to the same results;" from Sill's letter—"I do hate all I see about 'most anybody. Let a man write about himself. He's the only fellow who knows anything about it." So faithfully does the captain obey orders, that scarcely more than sixty of all the three hundred pages lie outside the poet's letters. The biographer's comments and reminiscent words from a few of Sill's life-long friends prevent monotony of epistolary matter. These illuminating comments, moreover, provoke into flashing colors the prism of personality lodged in the letters. There is no intrusion of anthology; there is no appraisal of poems; no excursion into criticism. A nice reserve keeps untouched things into which the public has no business to pry. Illustration of this withholding may be found in the matter of Sill's marriage, concerning which there is but one letter, an intimate sharing with a close friend of news of the poet's approaching wedding. Here is as much as the fondest reader friend has a right to know: "My Cousin Bess is to be

the bride. It is a love match which has been about ten years getting up. I've loved her ever since she was a little chap and she me. We always tacitly considered the consanguinity as a barrier, till, lately, we have decided to smash it." Those whose feelings have ever shrunk from the smudged print of biographies that rudely unseal the "sacred silences" of the Dead, may with keen delight follow this wise revelation of a finely tempered soul.

Revelation—that is it. To one who but a few short years ago found only most meager items the utmost that libraries could give of information of Sill, this "life" is in truth a revelation. A scant magazine note might state that the poet passed his boyhood in a Connecticut village; but how, except through such a biography, could one whose child heart had always longed for a baby elephant "pet," happily discover that this same boy of a Connecticut village was own kin to the romping lass of an Iowa town? "As I go on in life," reveals the "Angel of the backward look," "I find that two or three of the child's spectacles still keep for me their freshness. One of these is the elephant leading the circus procession through the village street. I never could see it enough, that huge, unearthly shape, moving solemnly along; flapping its wings of ears not for common and mundane fly-guards, but in some mysterious gesture or ceremonial; bending its architectural legs in the wrong place; waving its trunk in incantation; seeing none of the trivial street matters to right or left, but ab-

sorbed in Oriental dreams. I used to think it strange that people who were rich enough should not have one always pacing about their own backyards."

Or how could one know, without such a biography, that the dry-as-dust words of some "Who's Who" scribbler, "graduated from Yale in 1861," could screen a picturesque panorama only fragmentary bits of which may be staged here: "It was the custom of the professor of Greek to call upon members of the class to rise and read aloud passages of the text, giving beat, stress, and caesura. To this exercise, called scanning, Sill had a strong distaste, and among the reasons for his rustication was his response given with an air of extreme nonchalance, when called upon to scan, 'Please sir, I don't scan.' " "Not having grown up in a world where one amuses one's self; going to Puritan Yale where that world was unknown and abhorred, instead of to a Harvard where it was known and appreciated; realizing its Philistine side and having no opportunity to enjoy its aesthetic side, Sill hated it and every symbol of it. 'Society' he would have nothing of. When his beauty and eloquence made all the girls, after they heard him deliver the class poem, wild to have him introduced, he stubbornly refused, even his dearest who wanted to introduce him to their dearest. Yet we know that outside of 'social occasions,' no man was more attracted by women." "His figure was moderately tall and slight, but very graceful. But one day when I, who was taller and much heavi-

er, put on the boxing gloves with him, I realized to my cost that strength was not an affair of muscle alone."

Again, accounts of the years spent in California had a bare, unsatisfactory yield until Mr. Parker's painstaking research made them bear fruit. There is the stout adventuring on a sailing voyage around Cape Horn; the still contemplation of color and sounds and silences, of society and constellations and life, of death and immortality and love, truth absorbed in the moving midnight hour of a moonlit summer sea; a tenderly reared, idealistic youth's revulsion at the sordidness of the new western country—"I swore an oath not to make this people my people, nor their God my God, for their God is money;" the gradual unfoldment of understanding and appreciation—"And as with the vegetation, so with the children born here. Little human blossoms such as one rarely sees in the cold Atlantic states." Comes the record, finally, of his heroic struggles for the university at Berkeley, from the faculty of which he resigned, after twelve years—"tired nearly to death, not so much with the work as with the unpromising conditions of it, and its environment." It is during these years, the biography makes clear, that the winning charms of California bring about Sill's capitulation. Her spirit becomes his spirit, now and again flowing in opalescent springs of song:

"In this fair land whose fields lie robed in bloom,  
A living poem bound in blue and gold;  
With azure flowers like little specks of sky  
Fallen, tangled in the dewdrops, to the grass,  
And orange ones—as if the wealth below  
Had blossomed up in beaten flakes of gold."

Sometimes the expression of his love for the big country is sobered by his contemplation of her noble redwood forests:

"Listen! A deep and solemn wind on high;  
The shafts of shining dust shift to and fro;  
The columned trees sway imperceptibly,  
And creak as mighty masts when trade winds blow.  
The cloudy sails are set; the earth-ship swings  
Along the sea of space to grander things."

So, in countless ways, the maker of the new book unveils for us the man who, when admirers wished much to know him, insistently begged Thomas Bailey Aldrich, then editor of *The Atlantic*, to let him wear a "permanent mask" before the public: "More and more I wish all literary work was anonymous. These people who are madly tearing around after a reputation, and these people (worst of all) who assume that *we* are—that is really the appalling thing. . . . I had an offer recently to be personalized, which really scared me. The safest way is not to tell anybody, till things are a year or two old. Let a man

work his work in peace, and the devil take his name—the less likely to get anything more of him than that.” Sill persisted to the end in not telling. He has been dead nearly thirty years; but now, at last, we are by good fortune “told.”

Several chapters in the volume have for their background Sill’s years of teaching, when, “by dint of killing labor,” he was getting himself “into the shape of an almost tolerable schoolmaster.” Such years might popularly be fancied dull living—and duller reading for a biography. But Sill’s kind of scholarship, thorough-going enough, was not a dust-heap of dead facts swept up during selfish hours of withdrawal from those who had a reasonable claim upon his service. His life was the simple life of brotherhood, and truth, when he plucked it, burst into bloom fruitful and fair. “There is a world outside of Berkeley and it moves,” he asserts. “I don’t see that culture needs to cut us off from human warmth. . . . The very essence of culture is shaking off the nightmare of self-consciousness and self-absorption and obtaining a sort of Christian Nirvana—lost in the great whole of humanity: thinking of others, caring for others, admiring and loving others.” There is a wholesome sanity in his point of view: “We get a prejudice against the emotions, when we see them acting regardless of reason; and against calculation, when it is cold and motionless. How if they both go strewing along in one current, like the light and air? . . . I suspect that to

say that a certain motive is based on *love* is not saying that it is any lower than one based on logic." It is not surprising that even a college professor, with such an outlook on the world of books and the world of people, should reveal in his letters the portrait of a most human sort of man. Here is a home glimpse of the austere scholar whom "comparative philology, derivations, the laws of language, especially the comparative laws, interested greatly;" of the master who "expected paradigms to be so learned that they were rooted for a lifetime;" of a teacher whose students "were never allowed to have fun with a subject till they had accomplished the drudgery of it;" just a little home glimpse: "They were both (Mr. and Mrs. Sill) much taken up with the puppy. . . . Mr. Sill spent a long time over him, putting him to bed; the puppy would cry when left alone, and Mr. Sill would come back and fuss over him; at last he got a hot-water bag and put it just under the straw in the box and the puppy snuggled down to it and stopped crying at once. Mr. Sill came and told me that we 'had a good joke on that little dog; he thought it was his mother.'" Again, he may be writing as a professor of literature: "I should desire to hang my lecture room with pictures—not of the old traditional and forbidding decrepitudes, but of Milton, for example, as the charming young swordsman, with velvet cloak tossed on the ground and rapier in hand; of Homer no longer blind and prematurely agonized,

as it were, with our modern perplexities in finding him a birthplace, but as the splendid young Greek athlete, limbed and weaponed like his own youthful vision of Apollo. Pythagoras should be a gracious stripling, crowned with ivy-buds and stretched at a pretty goat-girl's feet, touching delicately the seven-stringed lyre. Even Moses might be shown as a buxom and frolicsome boy, shying stones at the crocodiles. Only Shakespeare, of all the pantheon, would need no change. His eternal youthfulness has been too much for the textbooks and the monument makers, and we always seem to conceive of him as the fresh-hearted and full-forced man he really was." Even the passages of literary criticism that Mr. Parker admits into his volume show the characteristic humanness of Sill: "When the German poet sings of war, it is with the solemnity of Körner's *Gebet Während der Schlact*. When the French poet sings of it, it is with the 'Gai! Gai!' of Béranger. In the one, you hear the heavy tread of men, a dull, regular beat, which after all, is not very distinguishable to the ear, as to whether it be an advancing column or a funeral march. In the other you hear only the bugles ringing and shouts of enthusiasm and excitement. In their treatment of love there is even sharper contrast. The German word *liebe* has quite a different atmosphere of suggestion from the French *amour*. The German poet sings of love and home; you feel that there is at least a possibility that the passion of today will outlast the year, or the years. Constancy is one of

its very elements. When the French poet sings of love, it is very delicate, rosy, beautiful, but we do not hear of home."

The most vivid impression one gets from the biography is the trait that shows two warring tendencies of Sill's temperament. He was an idealist, with the intense idealism of his splendid Puritan ancestry; but in his veins ran also the blood of splendid New England doctors and surgeons. Mysticism and materialism were ever active forces of his nature, and in their battling recognized no truce. Sill, the teacher, talking to his students, was Sill, the idealist: "When I look at you, it is as if I looked out on the dim, misty spaces of the dawn of a new creation, and as if I saw vague shapes of unknown possibilities forming and dissolving and reforming before me, and as if as of old the spirit of God were moving on the face of the waters." So when writing to a friend: "If we decide on service as the principal things, the question arises, Of what sort? Shall it be the washing of the feet, or the dying on the cross?—the small, common helplessnesses chiefly, or some special great absorbing service? . . . Somebody wrote me, 'Why don't you stop trying to make something of other people, and make something of yourself?' They are hardly compatible. Supposing the same amount of good to others from either way, is there not additional gain of good in the greater abnegation of self involved in the washing of the feet theory? . . . To me Duty seems to say that

one particle added to the world's true knowledge, or a single effort put forth to make men see higher things than food or money-getting, is better than all the bread-and-meat philanthropies." This insistent effort for the heaven that lay beyond his grasp marked his literary craftsmanship: "The more I write, the less I am satisfied," run the lines in a letter to the editor of *The Atlantic*. "Only the perfect works ought to be given to the public." During the restless days of trying himself out in the professions—law, medicine, theology—he confides to his college mate and friend, Henry Holt, the publisher: "A man must speak the truth as fast and as far as he knows it—truth to *him*. I may be in error, but what I *believe* is my sacred truth and must not be diluted. When I get money enough to live on I mean to preach religion as I believe in it. Emerson could not preach, and now I know why."

But the analyst, the dispassionate seeker of truth in matter, granted the mystic few hours of serenity. The conflict of temperament so characteristic of the poet stands out most clearly when, "given self," he undertakes "to find God." "I was thinking," he writes, "out into the material universe sweeping from star to star, system to system, till I got way off where I was *afraid* almost of the awful distance and darkness, and then there was infinite space stretching on and on, and no nearer to God. . . . I wish I had more faith in men, as well as in God. I have at times dragged anchor and drifted almost

out of sight of my belief in immortality, just from a mere consideration of the question, What is there in man worth perpetuation? . . . Do you read Spencer and Renan? I sort of shrink from these loud fellows who claim to know it all. Yet I presume it's our duty to hear what they say. Sometimes after some peculiar blessings from the good thought angels, I seem to get calmer and better views, and to feel these fellows to be all flippant and inadequate. . . . I rather incline to feel that all those people who die with no hope (or fear) of immortality are in for the biggest surprise of their lives. . . . If God would but reveal Himself in some little word that we might cling to as actual *truth*, among all the shadows. . . . I can't solve the problems—only the great schoolmaster Death will ever take me through the higher mathematics of the religious principia. . . . I have prayed and do pray for light, and if I seek truth with a pure desire and intention, I believe I shall find it at last."

In spite of the richness of the biography, one feels cheated, as he closes the book. Cheated not by the biographer, but by Fate. For Sill did not live out the full years of a man's lifetime. His morning slipped into afternoon, and then, as the moving shadows dimmed the bright upland slopes—somehow it calls back again those singing lines in *Field Notes*:

“And now the close of this fair day was come,  
The bay grew duskier on its purple floor,  
And the long curve of foam  
Drew its white net along a dimmer shore.”

So night waited for him on another coast. Perhaps, on second thought, there was no night. Perhaps, for all *true* poets—perhaps, for them—on the hills of God it is forever Day.

## **Flower-Lyrics**

(Set to music by LOUIS ADOLPH COERNE)

By WILLIAM ELLERY LEONARD

### **I. WILD VIOLET**

Out of the moss and under the fern  
Where no breeze blows,  
Purple and pale, in woodsy dale,  
After the snows.

Dew on her stem and cool green leaf,  
Where no sun glows,  
Will she be dead, ere blaze the red  
Poppy and rose?

### **II. GARDEN ROSE-BUD**

Tipped with white in the moon's half-light—  
Moonlight and starlight and lamp at the door—  
Out in the garden afloat on the night,  
Now as the dancers are crossing the floor.

Roses in bloom with the summer's perfume,  
Roses are swaying from bodice and hair;  
Out in the garden alone in the gloom,  
You on the morrow alone will be fair.

**III. POND-LILY**

Floater on the sultry pool,  
Chaste and delicate and cool,  
Round her weeds and sticks and scum—  
Winds, be gentle when ye come !

(Lily, O Lily, my Lily !)

Cup of sunshine,—on her brim  
Dragonfly aslant and slim—  
Someone shouts for me to take—  
No, not for my true love's sake !  
(Lily, O Lily, my Lily !)

**IV. WILD ROSE**

Rocks are around thee,  
Thickets have bound thee,  
Dust has defiled ;  
Yet I have found thee,  
Rose of the wild.

Bees pass above thee,  
Birds will naught of thee,  
Rose of the wild ;  
Why do I love thee,  
Like a lost child ?

## V. CARDINAL FLOWER

I cannot praise thee well:  
I had a lad's brief look—  
What was thy shape and smell,  
When, coming down the dell,  
We waded in the brook?

But as I hear thy name,  
Amid the flags I see  
A long stem tipped with flame,  
And think of her who came,  
The barefoot girl with me.

## The German Drama of the Present Century

By EDWARD H. LAUER

To him who has followed the course of German literature since the dawn of the twentieth century, it is apparent that the change in centuries has not brought with it a new movement in the field of the drama. If we should care to look back to find the last great epoch making event, we should have to revert to the late eighties of the preceding century, to the movement which we call naturalism. At that time, the various influences both foreign and German in nature gathered, and in *Die Weber* (1892) of Gerhart Hauptmann produced a work which is a landmark in the history of the German drama. Critics may differ as to the final and permanent aesthetic value of *Die Weber*; its importance as marking a step in the history of the drama is unquestioned, and the movement of which it is the best expression has left its impress on the drama down to the present time. This is not meant to say that the dominant tone of the modern German drama is naturalism. In fact if we were to seek for a dominant tone we might come to the conclusion, and rightly so, that the most marked tendency in the last fifteen years has been a gradual turning away from naturalism and a return to the romantic. But as yet no man has appeared, no movement has crystallized, no great work has been written which shall mark the

next step after naturalism in the history of the German drama as future generations shall write it.

When will this new epoch dawn? We have grown to look upon the naturalistic movement in Germany as historical and we seek for the "modern drama" which shall be its successor. The latter is however still in the making and will come when a genius arises in Germany, who will be able, much as Hauptmann was, to gather up the many threads and weave them all into a fabric of beautiful pattern and undoubted strength. We are too prone to call an age undramatic. The complexity of modern life in all civilized communities makes that life the fit material for drama. Schiller and Hebbel lived in any but dramatic ages and yet they gave us *Kabale und Liebe* (1784) and *Maria Magdalena* (1846)—plays deeply rooted in the times of the writers. What the age in Germany needs and is awaiting is a man, and until he comes the panorama of the passing years will present, as it does now, a chaotic turmoil of mighty striving and small ability, of many experiments and numerous failures, of great expectation and much disappointment.

None are more disappointed than the critics. It is trying to hail a man as the coming genius and then in his later plays be forced to chronicle that he has gone the way of many of his colleagues, that he was after all not the man. And when the German critic asks himself why he must wait so long, he comes forward with a long list of accusations

which might as well have been written by an American critic in New York or Chicago. The complaints are almost the same. Too many theaters necessitate the acceptance of plays without literary merit or stage craftsmanship. To offset this lack of plays recourse is had to importation from other countries. The acting is as bad as the plays. The theaters are run for the profit of the managers and the provinces must obey the dictates of the successful manager in the metropolis. The critic searches in vain for the real modern German drama, and in the early death of such men as Karlweis and Stavenhagen he laments the fact that here were men who had given promise of writing the longed-for play.

The above problems, touched upon by the critics, are familiar to the American reader. But it must not be inferred from this fact that any surprising similarity exists between the German stage and the stage in our American cities. There are several influences at work which give the German theatrical world a distinctive and peculiar character. The first of these is that the predominating practice is what we call the repertoire or stock-company system, although the critics are beginning to complain that the two American monstrosities—the star system and the long run—have come into Germany. In the next place the Germans have set out to bring the drama to the masses. Open-air productions in the forests and fields or in huge amphitheaters seating thousands must have a reflex on

the dramatic production, as is witnessed by the numerous *Festspiele* and pageants which are a feature of the municipal celebrations of towns both large and small. The stupendous productions organized by the wizard manager Reinhardt are part of this movement. In the third place the Germans, as well as other European peoples, have developed a large dramatic literature. Plays are printed as well as acted, and the book-marts are flooded with dramas of every conceivable type, category, classification and value. Even with the great demand for plays but a small per cent are produced. This fact and the fact that a rigid government censorship is exercised have led to the formation of numerous societies whose purpose it is to present in private assemblies, plays of interest which otherwise would not be produced. To accommodate these societies numerous little theaters have been built and put in operation. Fourthly, we must refer again to the immense number of translations from foreign tongues. The cosmopolitan character of the German stage is a matter of wonder. Almost fifty per cent of the new plays presented on Berlin stages from 1900 to 1915 were translations, and the other German cities were not far behind. This immense importation has, of course, not always redounded to the credit of the German managers, for in many cases it has served to exclude native authors of undoubted excellence. Finally this chaotic character of the theaters with their coqueting with

popular favor has led to what may be called the "great schism" in the German dramatic world. On the one side stands the general public with the writers who write what that public wants and the critics who believe that that public is after all the final court of appeal. Bitterly opposed to them stands a smaller circle of writers with their followers, the "literati" and the "illuminati," who believe in writing what the public ought to want. Needless to say the second class is far outnumbered and much decried but considers itself modern, progressive, and uplifting.

This schism in the theatrical world makes possible some sort of classification of the writers of the present century. The vast number of diverging tendencies and movements makes all classifications more or less unsatisfactory, but in presenting briefly some sort of survey of plays and playwrights it is best to begin with the division into two general groups, the popular writers and the literati.

The first of these groups contains a number of well-known names. There is first of all a group of men who grew up under the influence of naturalism. Hirschfeld, Halbe and Dreyer are writers of strength and power who attempt to incorporate the material of their times into social dramas, but who always fall short of real fulfillment. Fulda is another writer of uneven production, a master of easy versification and yet one whose work lacks depth and sincerity. The best of this group is Suder-

mann, who has also had an uneven development since the production of his first success *Die Ehre* (1890). He is a prolific writer of undoubted skill and facility in craftsmanship and technique, occasionally touching real poetic heights, whose work, however, is marred by a liking for striking effects, sharp antitheses, and melodramatic expedients. The truth and the convincing appeal of his works suffer because of these. All of these men stand head and shoulders above a host of popular writers whose business it is to please the populace. Blumenthal, Philippi, Kadelburg, Skowronnek, *et al.*, give what the public wants and bother but little as to the quality of their work.

Over against this group stands the coterie of the literati. It comprises but a few names and yet in these names are included the most interesting appearances in the development of the modern German drama. In the van stands Hauptmann. The present century has seen no less than ten works from his pen, diverse in character and uneven as to value. Unfinished fragments, studies in psychic phenomena, symbolistic puzzles, adaptations of mediaeval legends, and Greek epics, have passed along with plays of the crassest naturalism and others decidedly Ibsenesque in character. Of all, *Rosa Bernd* (1903) and *Gabriel Schillings Flucht* (1912) have been the best, although admiring critics would have us believe that all contain hidden springs of beauty and power. Hauptmann reveals everywhere

an ability at characterization, an ardent poetic nature, sensitive, sympathetic, and highly cultured, but a talent which has not been able to gather itself for the great final effort. *Die Weber* (1892) remains his most important contribution.

In the class of the literati are to be included such names as Bahr, Hoffmannsthal, and Schnitzler, all of whom are men with ultra-modern tendencies. Bahr has a talent wholly undramatic in character. His pieces are causeries in dramatic form and handle the most delicate themes with almost brutal indifference. His work is clever, even brilliant at times, but more often superficial, lacking finish, and entirely negative in influence. Hoffmannsthal is above all a poet, in whose poetry the whole development of German verse seems to be epitomized. Both he and Schnitzler seem to be representatives of that hypiculture of the over-refined modern European. There is a satiety and droopiness in their work which reminds only of the tired, jaded languor of the super-aesthetic. Both are artists, whose work however is marred by pathologic tendencies, of interest to be sure, but of little lasting value.

And finally we have in this group the Mephistophelian figure of Wedekind, the great puzzle of the modern dramatic world. At times, the most irreverent of scoffers, and then suddenly the most serious of reformers. Nothing seems pure and holy to him who at the next moment is preaching purity and holiness. His tragi-comic fragments bring every

species of perversity to view and present a world of grotesque irony whose symbol is a grinning death's head surmounted with a fool's cap. Wedekind can only be the product of a decadence, and he is in the German drama what Stuck and Klinger are in German painting, and what, in many ways, the operas of Richard Strauss are in German music.

In addition to these classes, many times independent of them and many times a part of them, are several other groups of writers of prominence and moment. Two of these groups are the writers of what the Germans call the "Standesstück" (the play presenting a picture of a certain social class) and the "Volksstück" (the play which clings to the soil). It was naturalism, with its emphasis on the presentation of the actual life, that fixed these two types, of which the modern drama has some worthy representatives. The former type is represented by Hartleben in *Rosen-Montag* (1901) and Beyerlein in *Zapfenstreich* (1903), plays which brought the life of the army officer on the stage; Ernst who portrayed the school circles in his *Flachsmann als Erzieher* (1901); and the earlier play of Meyer-Förster, *Alt-Heidelberg* (1898) which was the progenitor of the long line of student plays. These plays are of course more of contemporary interest and are not to be compared in lasting value with the Volksstück. In the latter, if anywhere, is the German national drama being produced. Stavenhagen was destined to be for the North German

drama what Reuter was for the North German novel. Schönherr, Ruederer, Thoma, and Ganghofer are writers of plays of the peasant class, and their works are destined to live. There are no more significant productions in the past decade than Schönherr's *Glaube und Heimat* (1910), Thoma's *Moral* (1910) and *Magdalena* (1912), Ruederer's *Fahnenweihe* (1908) and Stavenhagen's *Mutter Mews* (1905).

Significant perhaps for the future is the fact that the historical play is again raising its head. The death of Wildenbruch did not cause it to disappear from the boards; he had a number of successors. Weigand (whose cycle *Renaissance*, 1904, contains some of the best work of the century), Bartels, Herzog, von der Pfordten, and Gumpenberg strive for recognition with historical plays of merit and power.

And although the stage is still dominated by the realistic there is a gradual call for the romantic. All of the writers have striven to answer that call, and none more so than Hardt in his poetical *Tantris der Narr* (1908), and Stucken in his mysteries, *Gawan* (1910), *Lanzelot* (1910), and *Lanval* (1911), plays in verse of real poetic beauty and romantic atmosphere.

Scores of playwrights are courting popular favor, circling about the theaters like moths about a flame. This results in numerous tendencies, movements, and experiments very often opposed in purpose and generally disappointing in result. In all

this crowd and confusion, however, two things stand out. The naturalistic movement with its emphasis on presenting life as it really is has opened the door for the return of the tragi-comedy. One of Wedekind's fragments bears the significant title *So ist das Leben* (1907). In the second place the whole of modern stage construction and resulting technique has caused plays to be little more than the presentation of a series of related incidents more or less closely connected. The dramatic incident is the thing, and this fact, above all else, has been the cause for the immense popularity of the one-act play.

The future? Bold is he who in this time when the very foundations of the world seem to be trembling, bold indeed is he who would set up as a prophet. Before this immense world-upheaval the thinking reader viewed with interest the German dramatic world, for here, more than anywhere else, it might be asked whether or not the whole conception of the nature of the stage was changing. The blatant spokesmen of the naturalistic movement had heralded loudly a revaluation of all values and for a time it seemed as if our conception of dramatic values must change. The extreme position has not been held, but it remains a question whether the future will not again take up the cry, and whether the new drama will not have little respect for our historic conventions of action and conflict. When a public crowds the theater to hear the soul-analyses of a Hoffmannsthal, or the undramatic fragments

of a Wedekind, or the scintillating sketches of a Schnitzler, then it is pertinent to inquire whether our idea of the meaning of the term "dramatic" is not undergoing a change. In the future is held the answer.

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### **The Goals That They Understand**

By NELSON ANTRIM CRAWFORD

The art impulse is one of the great universal impulses. In the grey dawn of history men and women danced their dances, chanted their songs, and carved their bone weapons. Their art, however, dealt not with a Valhalla or an Avalon or an Arcadia, but with the mountains and rivers and trees and flowers and animals among which they lived and with which they felt a vague but intimate relation. Early art invariably and inevitably treated the near rather than the remote.

Except in certain periods of history, pictorial art has kept somewhat this attitude, but for generations any poet who has used for his subject matter the things near to the people and the things which the mass of men love, has been subjected to pronounced criticism. This has been the case particularly if the poet has ventured to employ everyday forms of expression. Even so relatively conservative a poet as Wordsworth was assailed with the now familiar

dictum, "This will never do," and critics have been saying of other writers the same thing, though usually in less forceful language, ever since. Men have attempted to put poetry into a strait-jacket of both substance and form.

It is this attitude which seems to underlie much of the adverse criticism of Vachel Lindsay's work, especially of the volume entitled *The Congo and Other Poems*. Such criticism naturally opens the whole question as to what is the proper subject matter and what is the proper form of poetry. Among the more unusual subjects taken by Mr. Lindsay are *The Congo, a Study of the Negro Race*; *The Santa Fe Trail*; *The Firemen's Ball*; *How a Little Girl Danced*; *Factory Windows are Always Broken*; and *To Mary Pickford, Moving Picture Actress*. These are not, it is to be admitted at once, the types of subject with which poetry has been usually familiar, any more than is Harriet Monroe's *State Street, Chicago*, or Sade Iverson's *Little Flowers from a Milliner's Box*. Yet unconventionality of subject does not essentially affect art values, and most clear-thinking people will continue to believe that there is no subject that is fit for thought and unfit for poetry. If this is not true—if poetry cannot be written about a firemen's ball or a city street—the whole romantic movement is a fraud, and Jeffrey, not Wordsworth, was unalterably right.

Without denying the equal poetic merit of more customary subjects, the writer is willing to go

further and say that the subjects chosen by Mr. Lindsay are for the average reader more in accord with the art spirit than are the subjects that have won the more nearly universal acceptance of critics. Poetry originated with subjects close to the life of the people, and poetry that has filled the popular heart has taken the themes and has spoken the language of the people. It is civilized sophistication that has chosen the more remote subjects for art, and in choosing these subjects it has taken poetry away from the people and made it an intellectual and aesthetic cultus.

It is to bring poetry back to the people that Mr. Lindsay and like-minded men and women are doing their work. Negroes, factories, and moving picture actresses are far more vital figures in the popular imagination of the present day than are the heroes of history, the forges of Hephaestus, or the loves of classical antiquity and the romantic Middle Ages. There was a time when the stories of Mount Olympus were the familiar possession even of slaves. *Aucassin and Nicolette* was once as vivid in the mind of its audience as *The Grand Babylon Hotel* is to-day. To certain peoples everything in nature gave a thrill of reverence and at the same time of the feeling of unity. Under such circumstances poetry on these subjects possessed genuine popular appeal. It does so no longer. Its present appeal is to the few.

The objection to Mr. Lindsay's poems on the ground that, as he himself points out, they appeal to

the "Higher Vaudeville" imagination is the objection of the sophisticated critic who would build about him a rose-garden-and-Walter-Pater world. If there is any sound artistic objection to vaudeville, the writer does not know it. He is inclined to think that the critic who objects to the Higher Vaudeville would listen with condescension or even contempt to the *Iliad* as Homer sung it, to *Beowulf* as it was chanted in the mead-halls, or to the simple, half-improvised melody of *Aucassin and Nicolette*.

Lyric or not, poetry was originally a song art, and the present-day value of this art is more than half recognized by the practically universal acknowledgment that poetry must be read aloud to be appreciated. Children still practice poetry as a song art in their games and pantomime plays—vaudeville unsophisticated and lovely. A poet's effort to bring something of the freshness and wonderment of childhood into the appreciation of older persons is not lightly to be discouraged. But how shall we learn except we be taught? The voice as well as the spirit of childhood is dim to most of us, and we need something more definite than exhortation to bring it back. The marginal notes which Mr. Lindsay has attached to some of his poems to assist the unaccustomed reader in chanting them are no more objectionable than a rubric in a prayer book directing the priest to turn to the people and say certain words in a loud voice. Nor, again, are they more objectionable than the directions accompanying music, or, indeed, than

the music of a song itself. Such slight typographical eccentricities as are employed in Mr. Lindsay's books are akin to the illumination of the mediaeval manuscript. What was this but the vaudeville of the scribe? In modern times typographical emphasis has been used effectively on the editorial pages of newspapers which appeal to a wide variety of readers. If we do not need it, why should we object to its being present for those who do?

If one admits that Mr. Lindsay treats subjects having themes proper to poetry, one can hardly deny the propriety of his method of treatment. There is a certain type of artistic attitude—not unlike the attitude of the early eighteenth century—which measures poetry by formulas. Certain verse forms and certain kinds of words are regarded as essential. Certainly no one can fail to admire the beauty of form found in the poetry of Shelley, of Morris, or of Swinburne, but no discriminating man or woman could fail to be shocked by the use of these verse forms and these words in a poem dealing with a firemen's ball. The principle here involved has been recognized for ages. All of us were quite as charmed when we came across Bishop Douglas's "ragged rolkis of hard harsk whin-stane" as we were when we read the most melodious line in the *Dies Irae*.

The words and the verse forms in common use to-day, moreover, it must be remembered, are at best but a few centuries old. Rime itself is a modern invention. The type of rhythm now common in Eng-

lish verse has existed there for less than a thousand years.

The attitude of mind that requires particular words or metrical structure or combinations of sound for appeal to the higher emotions may represent a type of idealism, but it is an idealism of objectivity. Such an idealism covers the world with the faint glow of an unrealized, indefinite golden age. A better idealism is that which depends on no words or forms or themes as formulas, but takes all things through the mind and conceives ideals subjectively. This is the method of childhood, and it is the method of the man or woman who is not bound down by sophisticated standards of criticism.

It is from this point of view that Mr. Lindsay's poetry must be appreciated. Is the negro race to be idealized in terms of the *Cid* or the *Song of Roland*? Mr. Lindsay thinks not. It is to be idealized in terms of its own racial characteristics, its "basic savagery," its "irrepressible high spirits," "the hope of its religion." No company of knights led by trumpet are the firemen. They are rather realized in the clatter and clang and crash of the burning city street. *The Santa Fe Trail* is no modern "road to nowhere;" the Middle West, which it typifies, is no earthly paradise. The automobiles that follow the trail—

"They are hunting the goals that they understand:—  
San Francisco and the brown sea-sand."

Is it not worth while that a poet of the United States should turn the minds of the people toward the goals that they understand?

That Mr. Lindsay's work represents perfection in the presentation of modern American life, no one believes, least of all Mr. Lindsay himself. Nor, for that matter, is all his poetic work devoted to an effort to realize the life of this country. It is his distinctively American poems, however, which form the most striking portion of his work. They are the poems which will turn, if anything will, the minds of everyday men and women back to the joy and solace and strength of poetry.

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### Vachel Lindsay's "The Congo and Other Poems"

To the Editor of THE MIDLAND:—

Your reviewer, writing of Vachel Lindsay's *The Congo and Other Poems* in your March number, has failed to recognize the originality of artistic invention that underlies these apparently boisterous lyrics. Taking, in many cases, the crude and raw elements of everyday American experience, Lindsay has put them through the passionate crucible of his mind and poured them out in a form that is fresh, vision-shot, and beautifully appropriate. The bang, the rush, the over-emphasis of his work, in such

poems as *The Congo*, are indeed effects which we have not been accustomed to find in serious poetry; but precisely these elements reveal themselves as admirable pigments for the depiction of Lindsay's chosen aspects of Middle Western life. I fear that the Middle West, needlessly vain, would prefer to see itself painted as if it were an Athens or an Arcady. This is a form of juvenile romanticism which we shall outgrow.

Meanwhile, Mr. Lindsay stands as one of the most noteworthy of American poets; and I venture, by means of this letter, to call him once more to the attention of those of your readers who may have been misled into thinking that they can safely dismiss him from their minds.

ARTHUR DAVISON FICKE

Davenport, March 8, 1915.



## *The Midland Library*

*The Social Problem* (Macmillan, New York, \$1.25) is a new volume by Charles A. Ellwood, Professor of Sociology at the University of Missouri. It is a consideration of the essential factors which have come to regulate human society.

Albert Watkins is the editor of *Collections of the Nebraska State Historical Society*, recently published by the Society at Lincoln, Nebraska. This volume contains twenty-four contributions, chiefly dealing with matters of local history. The general reader will be interested in the article entitled *The Work of the Historical Society*, by John Lee Webster, and in *The Importance of the Study of Local History*, by James E. Le Rossignol.

*Practical Programs for Women's Clubs*, by Alice Hazen Cass (A. C. McClurg, Chicago, net 75 cents), is a compilation of study subjects for the use of women's clubs and similar organizations. It is designed to give practical assistance to club women, especially those in rural districts, whose sources of information are somewhat curtailed. The subjects have a wide range, and their diversity will meet all demands. Each subject has eight divisions which may be used, if desired, for programs for one year's work.

*The Chief Contemporary Dramatists* (Houghton Mifflin, Boston, \$2.75 net) is an important and valuable anthology of modern plays, prepared under the editorship of Thomas

H. Dickinson. It includes twenty complete plays, representing the work of Wilde, Pinero, Jones, Galsworthy, Barker, Yeats, Synge, Gregory, Fitch, Moody, Thomas, MacKaye, Hauptmann, Sudermann, Brieux, Hervieu, Maeterlinck, Bjornson, Strindberg and Tcheknov. A more useful volume for the student of the modern drama could hardly have been devised.

One of the most interesting and significant of the religious publications issued by the University of Chicago Press is the new volume just announced under the title of *University of Chicago Sermons*, to which eighteen leading members of the various departments of the University of Chicago have contributed. The opening contribution is by Charles Richmond Henderson, late head of the department of practical sociology, whose reputation as preacher and scholar and social worker is international.

*Sunflowers, a Book of Kansas Poems*, is the title of a volume of poems collected by Willard Wattles and published at Lawrence, Kansas (\$1.00 net). The collector has chosen those poems only that "smack unmistakably of our Kansas soil and are close to the grass roots;" the volume therefore is not to be considered a complete anthology of Kansas verse. Kansas history, Kansas pioneer life, her heroes and heroines, her corn and wheat, her birds and flowers,—all are beautifully and lovingly dwelt upon; and over all rests that native sense of longing and upward looking voiced in *The Call of Kansas*, by Esther M. Clark, *Opportunity*, by John James Ingalls, and *The Gates Ajar*, by Albert Bigelow Paine. Kansas and the Middle West are fortunate in the possession of a man competent to do this work, and willing to devote a portion of his life to it.



## The Midland Chronicle

*Modern Philology* will hereafter appear twelve instead of ten times a year. There will be three general numbers instead of one, while the three groups of three numbers each, devoted to the respective fields of English, German, and Romance, will continue as before.

The absorbing interest of America in the European war is reflected in the April number of *The Mid-West Quarterly*. It contains the following articles: *Canada and the War*, by James E. Le Rossignol; *The Invasion of Belgium*, by Charles S. Allen; *German vs. English Aggression*, by A. D. Schrag; *Colonial Aspects of the War*, by C. D. Allin; *Diplomatic Background of the War*, by B. E. Schmitt; and *The Ideal of Peace*, by S. B. Gass.

The April number of *The Iowa Journal of History and Politics* contains as its initial article a history of *The Half-Breed Tract*, written by Jacob Van der Zee. *The Career of David Rich* is discussed by George Evan Roberts. Dan Elbert Clark writes of *Some Episodes in the Early History of Des Moines*. *The Oldest Land Titles in the State of Iowa* is the title of a second article by Mr. Van der Zee. One of the most interesting items in the number is an account of *The Indians of Iowa in 1842*, written by two Friends who were sent to the Indians by their church in that year, and reprinted from *The Friend* of December 23, 1843.

The April number of *The Quarterly Journal of the University of North Dakota* is devoted to the natural sciences, and includes a number of important articles. The next issue will be given over to the political and social sciences.

*The Missouri Historical Review* for April contains several articles of especial interest to students of literary progress in the Middle West. These are *Nathaniel Patten, Pioneer Editor*, by F. F. Stephens; *Bibliography of the Missouri Press Association*, by F. A. Sampson; and *Books of Early Travel in Missouri*, by the same author.

The current number of *Outing* contains an article by Fred J. Lazell, entitled *A Robin Family in Photographs*. It tells the story of a family of robins, from the building of the nest to the departure of the young birds. This article is written in Mr. Lazell's sympathetic and attractive style, and with its thirteen excellent photographs forms a very interesting item to lovers of the out-of-doors. Mr. Lazell is the author of four delightful volumes of out-door studies in Iowa.

William C. Edgar contributes interesting articles on various phases of the European war to recent numbers of *The Bellman*. The latest of these, *How England Feels the War*, is illustrated with many facsimiles of posters printed by the English government in its call for volunteers. *A Migration of Poets*, by Nathan Haskell Dole, is a sketch of the personalities and works of Vachel Lindsay, Robert Frost, and Harlan Hoge Ballard, written from the standpoint of a New Englander. Recent contributors of verse include the names of Witter Bynner, Amelia Josephine Burr and Sara Teasdale.

In the April 5th issue of *Greenwich Village*, a new periodical which bears the interesting subtitle, "A Fortnightly, Edited by Guido Bruno in his Garret on Washington Square," appears an article which will be of interest to the middle western reader. It is entitled *Publishing Book-plate Magazines*, and is contributed by H. Alfred Fowler of Kansas City, editor of *The Miscellany*, which has been mentioned before in this department. The article covers a very interesting chapter in the history of publishing in the Middle West. The magazines discussed include *The Book-plate Booklet*, *The Ex Libran*, and *The Biblio*. The four numbers of *The Ex Libran* probably constitute the finest specimen of printing yet produced in the Middle West.

Lovers of good verse find a special pleasure in reading the April number of *Poetry*. Lyric beauty, artistic craftsmanship, and genuine depth of emotion illuminate every page. In such a well balanced table of contents it is hard to pick out offerings worthy of special mention, but perhaps *The New World* by Witter Bynner, *On First Looking into the Manuscript of Endymion* by Charles Hanson Towne, the stanzas of *The Wayfarer* by Padraic Colum, and *In the Orchestra* by Wilfrid Wilson Gibson leave the most lasting impressions. John Gould Fletcher contributes an enlightening review of Miss Amy Lowell's "Polyphonic Prose"—the name which he gives to her longer works compounded of *vers libre*, prose, and traditional metrical verse. Truly this is a creditable beginning for the sixth year of the one publication devoted to enriching the possibilities of American poetry.

